851 birth of a child involves a few prohibitions which affect the whole village and apply to the Batswá as well as the Baotó. They do not affect inhabitants of a portion of the village which is separated by a swamp from the group where the happy event has occurred. Those bound by the prohibitions may no longer go to "work" -- that is, to work in the fields, fetch food or firewood, build a hunting enclosure or a fishing weir, or work at the building or repair of a house. An infraction of this rule would result in the destruction of the fruit of all their labor: the fields would no longer produce, and no beast or fish would be caught. This deadly influence would [484] extend to all crops, etc. no matter whom they belong to. Nevertheless, there is nothing wrong in fetching firewood from the forest, harvesting manioc from a ripe field, or cutting the fruit of the palm.

Strictly speaking, these prohibitions touch only persons who have seen the newborn child. But since no one fails to go and admire it, all are subject to them. The prohibitions remain in effect until the umbilical cord is detached. Some tribes, however, [184] have the more convenient custom of limiting its duration to the day of the child's birth.

2. The hygiene of mother and child

[844] The umbilical cord (lokóki) is cut near the middle. An incision is made near the infant's navel. Each day a concoction of 846 herbs is poured on the part of the cord that is still attached and white sand is put on it to make it dry more rapidly. When the end falls off, a powder made of scorched banana is applied to the wound.

In order to prevent the weakening of a woman's abdomen, it is bound with a belt made of bands of the dried bark of the banana tree (ekutú).

The assistants wash the mother and child. On the mother they place dried leaves or bark of the banana tree which have been carefully crumpled. They are put on like panties to catch the blood and are replaced by new ones whenever necessary. Nowadays pieces of cloth are often used; they are put on like a man's garment.

846 515 In order to facilitate the flowing out of all the blood, the mother is given hot baths. However, they are not begun before noon, for the Nkundó say that in the morning and evening it is too cool and the blood is not sufficiently fluid. Those who have been [177] in greater contact with the Whites give the mother beer or wine to drink. The hot baths are administered behind the hut in an en- [343] closure set up for the occasion. They are of two kinds: baths by sprinkling (bompúlo wá mbáomba) and steam baths (bompúlo w'elángé). For the first method [485] very hot water is used, and by using a bunch of palms, the woman's abdomen, loins, and ribs are sprinkled. In the second method a pit is dug and large leaves (or a basin) containing boiling water are placed in it. Three or four strong, wide sticks are placed on top, and the woman is seated on them. She is wrapped in several mats to which, today, one or two blankets are added. She is left thus exposed to the action of the steam for several minutes. According to the natives, it is the ideal system because it makes all the blood come out, or almost all. Some people first give a sprinkle bath, and then follow it with a steam bath; others are satisfied with one or the other, depending on the circumstances. In any case more than one bath is never given in one day. This care may be given for one or two weeks, or it may stop after two or three days. The effect of "civilizing" is more inclined to the latter. But no Nkundó would want to omit the baths, for the woman's life is at stake.

After the bath the woman is carefully rubbed and dried, [302] and then anointed with oil mixed with red paint.

From time to time, usually every second day, she is given a douche.

846 As long as the mother remains weak, a large fire is maintained in her hut to keep her warm, and the doors are closed by means of palms. The husband and his relatives fetch the firewood. But the first log must be cut and brought by the husband who, to use the Nkundó expression, must "remove the violence" (ímola lofasó. In the beginning the woman lies down on a boánga right near the fire. She turns the front of her body toward it. The fire plays a great role in her quick recovery. She is very well cared

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●946 for and fed so that she may regain her strength rapidly. [486]

3. Seclusion

After childbirth the mother remains secluded (-ulama) in her hut for several weeks -- two, three, or more, depending on circumstances and especially on her husband's social position. Her seclusion is called julé. The hut bears the same name, or else it is called janga, "palm leaf." Sometimes the term ekelé is also applied to it, denoting the period of seclusion with all the special regulations it involves. These are as follows:

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[184] 1) Meals. In some tribes the woman may already eat on the day of the delivery. But among others she is only permitted to drink. The reason for this fast is given in the form of a legend. One day
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[944] long ago a Botswa asked his master for a little manioc, but the master refused to give it to him. The master's wife had just given birth. Annoyed by the refusal, the Botswa cursed his master, saying: "From now on your women will have to fast the day they give birth." (1) Another explanation is that at sometime in the past someone refused food to a slave who was about to be sacrificed at a feast of the lifting of mourning. Tribes and villages that do not give any reason of this sort permit a woman to eat in the evening, if the delivery takes place in the morning.

1. Batswa women never fast under such circumstances.

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[833] A mother's first meal is prepared by a woman who has performed the carnal act the preceding night. She goes to draw water, and on her return she fastens or attaches over the door of the seclusion hut a piece of palm (janga) or, among the Bombwanja, a piece of dried banana leaf; in this way she informs everyone that it
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[262] is a house of ekelé. Then she prepares the food, which consists of bananas with fish or a hen in palm-oil sauce. It is eaten by the mother and her husband as well as the cook. Their very young children may also delight in it, but [487] the older ones, approaching puberty, may not. The newborn child is given a tiny bit of the sauce to taste.

[846] [589] For a young unmarried mother, the meal is prepared by a girl who has not reached puberty or a woman who is quite old, that is, by someone who does not engage in sexual intercourse.

2) Various regulations. From the time of the preparation of the first meal until the end of the bokeka, that is, until the day the umbilical cord becomes detached, the hearth of the seclusion hut is sacred, so to speak. Apart from the couple and the assistants, no one may enjoy it or profit from it, either to light anything from it or eat anything that has been prepared there. However, some men have a means of lifting the prohibition pertaining to the fire. Upon the hearth and all the hearths of the village or a group of houses, depending on the situation, they let fall a few drops of a special concoction.

It is also forbidden to sweep or pick up the ashes from the fire. Everything must stay put until the umbilical cord of the newborn child becomes detached.

During the entire period of seclusion, the mother is assisted by a kinswoman (or one of her husband's kinswomen; among the Bombwanja there are always two), who is the wujisa, "the one who makes the seclusion" (from the verb uja). The seclusion should not be thought of as that of a hermit; the mother may go out as soon as her condition permits, and the helper goes about her occupations, but she does not do so more than necessary. Rather the hut is a house of prohibitions.

During this period the mother and her helper do not do farm [834] work. In addition they must abstain from carnal relations and from all contacts with the opposite sex, in conformity with the customs explained in Article II, 3, above. The ekelé extends to the husband and to any other person who enters the hut. Any infraction results in the death of the mother or the child in the same manner as in the case of the bokeka (see loc. cit) . [488]

3) The end of the bokeka. When, at the end of four or five days, the umbilical cord becomes detached, the news is announced to the whole village, so that everyone may go back to their work that has been suspended. The following night the father [833] and mother perform the conjugal act to "destroy the bokeka and

846 to be able to nurse the child together." This does not mean that
833 from then on they may have regular sexual relations, for these are not permitted until after the end of seclusion. But if they were to omit the act at this time, they would have to abstain from it until the child is weaned. The Nkundó say that the act is performed "only a little." For many it becomes masturbation; others withdraw before obtaining the effect of the act. In no case may the act reach its natural climax. The reason for this practice is unknown to me. Perhaps it is done in order not to molest the woman while she is in a painful condition.

846 The next day the ashes in the hearth of the seclusion hut are swept out, and the fire becomes "ordinary"; anyone may use it and eat food prepared on it.

4) The umbilical cord is dried on the bolíkó (a tray or shelf) and then buried at the foot of a young banana tree planted for that purpose, preferably under a bonkoní tree if possible. The ashes and sweepings from the seclusion hut are thrown there. The banana tree is called nkíndá. (1) Its fruit may be eaten only by the child's

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1. This is a generic term used for any banana tree planted for a special purpose (a magical practice, a game, etc.).

[153] grandfather and grandmother. If another person eats it, he will be punished with a headache of a nervous type.

846 The umbilical cord is always buried in the father's native
614 soil. People who are far from home (laborers for the Whites, etc.) preserve the umbilical cords of their children with great care in order to take them back [489] when they return to their village, or send them back when a favorable opportunity arises. The Nkundó hold to this usage tenaciously, because a person whose umbilical cord is not buried in the lands of his paternal clan has no authority in the group. The person involved would meet with the following objection: ntákokúndela lokolé, ntákokundela lokokí, óyakúmya ngámo? olé nk'eyâya, "The lokolé was not beaten for you, your

846 umbilical cord was not buried; how dare you boast? You are but a
614 stranger." Therefore this custom constitutes a sort of matriculation into the family. If anyone wants to be entirely certain of a Nkundó's clan, he has only to look for the place where his umbilical cord was buried.

5) The end of seclusion is marked by a few ceremonies.

846 A. A meal. Early in the morning of the day set, the hus-
302 band goes and cuts a bunch of fruit of the palm tree, and the helper goes and picks manioc leaves (nowadays leaves and fruit collected the day before are sometimes used). The helper crushes all of this to make a dish of food. While she cooks it over the fire, she shaves a little hair off the mother, plucks out one eyebrow, and cuts one of her nails. Then she does the same to the child. The helper moves away, and the father comes in. His wife subjects him to the same treatment, and he reciprocates, doing the same to the child. The rubbish is simply thrown away without any ceremony. This practice has no special name; the Nkundó say: báyaténa bekengo, báyakenga, "They shave each other's heads."

When the vegetables are ready, all the women of the vil-
846 lage are gathered together. A little pit is dug in front of the hut. A large leaf is placed in it to serve as a dish, and the vegetables are poured into it. The mother, the helper, and all those assembled eat. Except for a few small boys no representatives of the stronger sex are present. When the meal is completed, [490] the leaf that served as a plate and those that served as spoons are buried in the pit. Today the more advanced of the population use a European plate and spoons. The meal and the vegetables eaten are called losanganya, "reunion," because the entire village is united in partaking of them, or lofanjola, "dispersion," because it is the prelude to the end of the bokeka.

B. Then follows the ceremony of separation (-téna bofofó, or, among the Injóló, bokékélékó. (1) The bofofó is the mid-rib

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1. The expression and the ceremony designated by it are used whenever an important matter, such as a trial, etc., is to be terminated.

846 of a dried banana leaf. Three knots are tied in it. The helper holds it in one hand and with the other cuts off the first knot, which she carries away with her. The mother keeps her end in her hand and presents the other to her husband. She receives the knife from the hands of the helper and cuts between the two knots so that each spouse carries away his end. Each time the parties involved say, "We have cut the bofofó; we are separating; go away." Having thus bid each other farewell, each fastens his end to the roof of the seclusion hut.

This ceremony ends the period of seclusion and puts an end 846 to the ekelé prohibitions. From then on the couple may have sexual 837 relations together, the helper can resume her usual life, and adultery on the part of the father can no longer harm the child or the mother. Note, however, that the child's immunity to the father's misconduct implies one condition: the father must not take it on his knees the day he commits adultery. By the following day the effects of his act have been nullified. A woman can discover her husband's infidelity through his refusal to take the child. Often she makes use of this means to obtain a confirmation of her suspicions. Some men abstain from all misconduct solely to guard against any such possibility. Adultery may have a harmful influence on the child even after it is weaned if it has a weak constitution. [491] All this seems to indicate that the reaction is considered to be physical and direct rather than a sanction based on religion or superstition.

Nkundó therapeutics include an antidote, however; it is 846 called bondandota (from ndota "an illness caused by the infraction 789 of prohibitions of a sexual nature"). It consists of a potion made [278] from the sap of an aroid bearing the same name, which is mixed with the sap of the libúlúkakó plant. If for some reason or other the couple have been away from each other for a fairly long time, they sit or stand face to face and take the child on their knees, which touch each other, and each one makes the child drink the potion twice, once from each hand, making sure to turn its face toward him [or her]. Usually the couple also drink some of the brew, though it is intended primarily for the child. Without these precautions the relations between the pair and the father's

846 taking the child would cause the child's death. The same precau-
789 tion is also in order if the husband goes on a trip before the child's birth and does not return till after the delivery

We have just seen that the harmful effects of the father's
846 misconduct on his child's life is effectuated through the father's
837 act of taking the child on his knees. Thus the Nkundó speak of baóngó b'ábé, "a father's bad knees," to indicate his reprehensible
[826] conduct, and they say that the bondandota potion is administered to the child so that it will not die because of the father's bad knees. (1)

1. The expression baóngó b'ábé is also used when an undertaking which requires continence is unsuccessful. (See Article II, 3).

When a child has painful and persistent diarrhea, it is often
753 interpreted as the effect of the father's infidelity. As soon as they
954 become aware of it, the couple separate for some time, and the father no longer touches the child. [492]

Contrary to what one reads on this subject about other peo-
837 ples of the Congo, Nkundó couples do not have to remain continent
834 beyond the period of seclusion. The separation ceremony gives the
789 husband back the freedom of action he had before his wife's pregnancy. For the wife the bokeka remains strict with respect to illicit relations until the child is weaned. However she, too, may regain her freedom by having recourse to an antidote, the ingredients of which she purchases from a person who holds the secret. The ingredients are placed in a small antelope horn which is then stopped
[824] up by means of bolaká (resin from the Symphonia gabonensis). The interested party wears it about her loins on a string or a bead belt or, preferably, on a special creeper. This amulet protects the child's life from the harmful influence of the mother's acts of adultery, but it does so only on condition that she does not separate herself from the child, as we will explain further on. This procedure

837 is not morally condoned, and a woman who resorts to it does not
834 escape criticism. She is compared to a goat, who does not have
789 a regular and steady husband: álómya bóna lontaa, "she nurses her child as a goat does." (1)

1. The opposite of lómya lontaa, -- if it is used to show the contrast -- is lómya lontómbá.

When the separation ceremony is ended, the mother is
● 846 adorned with all her ornaments and goes out to walk in a procession through the village. The child is carried by an older sister, a niece, etc. He is taken around the village, bánangya bǒna l'olóló Small presents are offered him everywhere -- an arrow, a small knife, a hairpin, etc There is no feast, however; if that honor were accorded him he would die of it (for when someone dies, there is always a feast of farewell in his honor). [493]

Article IV. Nursing

853 During the first few days after birth an infant does not suck the milk of its mother, since it is "too hot." He is fed by a third person, preferably a relative.

On the third day the following occurs:

953 1) The mother's breasts are massaged (-kulola baéle). For
757 this purpose the Nkundó use leaves of the bǔte creeper and the lilongyá plant (Adenostemma viscosum Forst.), a green leaf from a banana tree called nselenge, several pieces of peeled sugar cane, the tips of the dried leaves of any banana tree, and sometimes other plants are added as well. All the ingredients are crushed, then boiled, and white sand and a bit of red paint are mixed in with them. The mixture is called ndengó. It is prepared by the women who are in charge of massaging the breasts. The bǔte leaves, however, must be picked by the father. He goes to the forest early in the morning and first shakes the creeper so that all leaves that are not firmly attached will fall off. Then he climbs it and picks the desired